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WORLD CONFERENCE ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Preparatory Committee
Fourth session
Geneva, 19-30 April 1993
Agenda item 5

STATUS OF PREPARATION OF PUBLICATIONS, STUDIES AND DOCUMENTS FOR THE WORLD CONFERENCE

Note by the Secretariat

Contribution by the International Federation of Human Rights

1. The attention of the Preparatory Committee is drawn to the written statement on the question of religious intolerance presented by the International Federation of Human Rights, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (category II), within the framework of the Regional Meeting for Asia for the World Conference on Human Rights.

2. The International Federation of Human Rights (IFHR) recommends that the United Nations system should improve its efforts to protect freedom of religion in the world by strengthening the Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance. Specifically, the IFHR suggests that the Special Rapporteur be granted wider investigative powers and latitude in making recommendations to specific Governments in pursuance of their obligations under human rights law.

Increased protection of the right to religious freedom

The IFHR is deeply concerned about the concept of the indivisibility of human rights and its implementation in the Asian-Pacific region. Specifically, we would like to stress that the right to religious freedom is an indispensable right, as provided by article 18 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, and therefore a fundamental freedom that should be exercised by each and every person.

Religious freedom, like all fundamental freedoms, cannot be suppressed on the justification of national sovereignty or national security. At the same time, it is a right that must be respected by all States as a necessary component of the indivisibility and universality of human rights all over the world.

The IFHR therefore urges the Asian Preparatory meeting to give serious consideration to the necessity to protect and enhance the rights to freedom of religion and expression.

Instead, the exercise of these rights should be seen as a catalyst for democratization and the long-term protection of human rights.

At this point, the International Federation on Human Rights would further like to recommend that the United Nations system should improve its efforts to protect freedom of religion, not only in the Asian-Pacific region, but in the world. In the strengthening of thematic mechanisms, which is very urgently needed, the Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance should be given increased authority. We therefore suggest that this and other special rapporteurs be granted wider investigative powers and latitude in giving concrete recommendations to specific Governments in pursuance of their obligations under human rights law. Moreover, the treaty-monitoring bodies, in consideration of State compliance with their obligations to respect religious freedom, should integrate into their monitoring function the findings of this specific thematic mechanism. In this way, there would be greater coordination between the charter-based system and treaty-monitoring bodies in the enhancement of religious freedom in the world.